

# Prevent Bleeding When Taking Blood Thinners

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**Blood thinners** are medicines used to keep harmful blood clots from forming in your body. Blood thinners can also prevent existing blood clots from getting bigger. These medicines do not really “thin” your blood, but make it harder for a blood clot to form.

**The two most common types of blood thinners are:**

- **Anticoagulants:** These medicines increase the time it takes for your blood to clot and makes it harder for a blood clot to form. These medicines include:
  - ▶ Warfarin (Coumadin or Jantoven)
  - ▶ Heparin
  - ▶ Dabigatran (Pradaxa)
  - ▶ Rivaroxaban (Xarelto)
  - ▶ Fondaparinux (Arixtra)
  - ▶ Enoxaparin (Lovenox)
  - ▶ Dalteparin (Fragmin)
  - ▶ Apixaban (Eliquis)
  - ▶ Edoxaban (Savaysa)
- **Antiplatelets:** These medicines prevent the platelets in your blood from sticking together and forming a blood clot. These medicines include:
  - ▶ Aspirin
  - ▶ Clopidogrel (Plavix)
  - ▶ Ticagrelor (Brilinta)
  - ▶ Ticlopidine (Ticlid)
  - ▶ Prasugrel (Effient)
  - ▶ Pletal (Cilostazol)

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**This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

## Important Things to Remember

When you take blood thinners, you are at a higher risk for bleeding. It is important to always follow these safety precautions.

- Blood thinners work best when they are taken as directed by your doctor. It is important to have blood tests done as ordered by your doctor.
- Tell your doctors, pharmacist, dentist and any of your health care team members if you take blood thinners. Keep an up-to-date list of all your medicines with you. Make sure to include the dose, amount and how often you take the medicine.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before you take any new medicine to make sure it is safe for you to take with your blood thinner. This includes any vitamins or herbal supplements, prescription medicines and over-the-counter medicines and remedies. **Do not** take any new medicines that may contain aspirin, such as pain relievers or cold or stomach medicines.
- **If you are going to have a test, procedure or surgery**, you may be told to stop taking your blood thinner and then restart it later. Talk with the doctor who ordered your blood thinner and the doctor who ordered your test, procedure or surgery about how to take your blood thinner.
- **If you have a stent, do not stop taking your medicines to prevent clots without first talking to the doctor who put in your stent.** For more information, ask for the patient education handout [Protect Your Stent](#).

## Food and Blood Thinners

The foods you eat can change how some blood thinners work in your body. It is important to follow food guidelines when you take blood thinners. Talk to your doctor or dietitian if you have any questions.

- If you take **warfarin (Coumadin)**, you will need to watch the amount of **vitamin K** rich foods you eat. Keep the amount of vitamin K in your diet the same from week to week. A high increase or a high decrease in the vitamin K foods you eat may cause problems in the way your blood clots. Foods high in vitamin K include: green leafy vegetables, spinach broccoli, cabbage, greens (collard, turnip, beet, mustard and dandelion greens) kale, and brussel sprouts. For a more complete list, ask your doctor or dietitian for the patient education handout [Diet and Warfarin \(Coumadin\)](#).

- ▶ Check with your doctor or dietitian before you take any dietary supplements like Ensure or BOOST. Some supplements contain high amounts of vitamin K.
- Check with your doctor before you take any vitamin supplements. Some vitamins can change how your blood thinner works.
- **Do not drink alcohol if you take blood thinners.**

## General Tips to Prevent Bleeding

- **Prevent Falls and Other Injuries**
  - ▶ Make your home a safe environment. Ask for the patient education handout [Safety Tips to Prevent Falls at Home](#).
  - ▶ Ask for help with walking.
  - ▶ Bending over, with your head lower than your shoulders, may cause you to get dizzy and fall. When you bend, make sure to bend your knees and keep your head up.
  - ▶ **Do not** play contact sports or do other activities where you could get hurt, such as football, hockey or skiing.
  - ▶ Wear protective gear, such as helmets and elbow and knee pads, during non-contact sports.
- **Protect Your Skin**
  - ▶ Use an electric razor when you shave.
  - ▶ Wear gloves when you use sharp tools such as knives or scissors and when you work with plants or yard tools.
  - ▶ **Do not** walk barefoot or wear open-toed shoes or flip-flops. Wear supportive shoes or non-skid slippers to protect your feet.
  - ▶ Keep your nails trimmed and clean.
  - ▶ Check your skin for any sores or open cuts that could bleed.
  - ▶ **Do not** cut corns or calluses on your feet or hands. Talk to your doctor if you have these problems.
  - ▶ **Do not** wear tight fitting clothes or elastic, including tight socks, undergarments and pantyhose.

- **Prevent Constipation**
  - ▶ Drink 8 to 10 cups of non-caffeinated fluid each day and eat a healthy diet.
  - ▶ **Do not** strain when having a bowel movement. Ask your doctor about a stool softener or a laxative that is safe to use.
  - ▶ **Do not** use enemas, suppositories and any harsh laxatives that could cause rectal bleeding.
  - ▶ Exercise to help with constipation.
  
- **Keep Your Mouth Healthy**
  - ▶ Use a soft toothbrush or WaterPik. **Do not** use harsh or abrasive toothpaste. Use waxed dental floss. **Do not** use toothpicks.
  - ▶ Check your mouth each day for bleeding or sores.
  - ▶ If you wear dentures or a retainer, remove these for at least 8 hours each day to give your mouth a rest. **Do not** wear dentures or retainers that do not fit well.
  - ▶ Talk to your doctor and your dentist about your medicines before you have any dental work done.
  
- **Prevent and Treat Nose Bleeds**
  - ▶ Use a humidifier to add moisture in the air, especially if you have the heat on in your home.
  - ▶ **Do not** blow your nose hard or with force.
  - ▶ Watch for nosebleeds, especially after you sneeze. If you have a nosebleed:
    - Apply pressure and ice to your nose and the back of your neck.
    - Sit with your head and body leaning forward. **Do not** lie down or put your head back.
    - **If the bleeding lasts more than 30 minutes get medical care.**

## **When to Get Medical Care**

**You should get medical care right away if you have any of the following:**

- Bleeding that does not stop or is very heavy
- A serious fall or injury to your head
- Severe headache, confusion, weakness or numbness
- Coughing up blood
- Blood in your vomit or vomit that looks like coffee grounds
- Menstrual bleeding or a period that is much heavier or lasts much longer than normal
- Red or dark brown colored urine
- Bowel movements that are red or black like tar
- Frequent nosebleeds
- Heavy bleeding from your gums
- Unusual bruising, swelling or discomfort
- Severe stomach ache